

An Encouraging Life

AC 4:36-37 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

I knew that my wife had experienced a very tumultuous relationship with her Mom while she lived at home. It was obvious that some hurtful and critical words had been spoken and some deep wounds had been inflicted.

A short time ago her Mom passed away and my wife traveled to the distant funeral. When she returned I recall my wife summarizing the funeral and her relationship with her mom in only the few words, "She can't hurt me anymore." I obviously had never fully known the depths of my wife's pain but those words revealed it all.

Wouldn't that be a sad epitaph to have for anyone's life? I guess we all hope that someday when we are gone it won't be like pulling a finger out of the lake and that space instantly being filled in. I began to wonder what epitaph others might say or write about me. When we end our days will there be no evidence that we walked this way or perhaps will there be evidence we walked this way because we left a negative influence as our legacy?

Unfortunately, I have found that my problem solving nature is often in opposition to a life of faith, hope and encouragement. In our jobs we are often paid to solve problems and my job in Information Technology is no exception. We are paid to be critical and to doubt and to even challenge or attack other people's ideas. Often we are assessing risks and thinking about what is the worst possible outcome that can happen in a given situation and what our response will be should that occur. Unfortunately, we are not geared to think about what would happen if things went right or what would happen if God showed up and provided a miracle.

I guess I have tried to counter this negative and problem solving attitude by trying to focus on the type of life modeled by Barnabas. We know Barnabas was a regular companion of Paul throughout the book of Acts. Originally he was named Joseph but the Apostles soon renamed him Barnabas which means "Son of Encouragement". Obviously, he had a quality of life that made him the kind of guy that was an encouragement to others. The glass was not just half full for him, it was overflowing and that positive attitude impacted those around him.

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem none of the disciples wanted to have anything to do with him for fear he was acting as a double agent to persecute Christians. Barnabas told the rest of the disciples about what had happened to Paul on the road to Damascus and how God's hand was now on him.

Barnabas was willing to go to bat for others and even confronted the Apostle Paul when he felt that Mark was someone worthy of a second chance. Later on in Paul's life and ministry he had come to value Mark and sought company. It was obvious that in the interim, Barnabas had been used of God to help Mark grow. Mark was not the same man anymore because he had walked with Barnabas. Martyred in 61AD he left behind his legacy of encouragement in the life of Mark, Paul and probably many others of the early church he ministered to. I want to be encouraging others like that and when I'm gone want to have my legacy be one of positive reinforcement and encouragement just like Barnabas.

1TH 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

